

>> However, that same data indicates that when law enforcement and domestic violence programs intervene, those negative effects can be diminished in children, and, there are safe alternatives to resorting to out-of-home placement.

In an article titled, 'Police in the Lives of Young Children Exposed to Domestic Violence,' Dr. Miriam Berkman of Yale University's Child Study Center and Dr. Dean Esserman, Providence (R.I.) Police Chief address several ways to promote healthy development in children affected by domestic violence. Berkman and Esserman identified specific categories that provide a framework for police action regarding children in DV cases. Those categories include:

- Supporting parents' efforts to keep their children safe.
- Recognizing children's physical and psychological dependence on parents.
- Building officers' awareness of how victims and witnesses experience violence and trauma.
- Interacting with adults and children in a respectful and non-punitive way.
- Establishing institutional connections between police departments and other community and cultural resources that support battered women and their children.

Using these categories as a foundation, the authors suggested several ways officers can help children in the cases they work. The first is to recognize the importance of restoring order and safety in the family's home.

"Violence interrupts children's experience of consistent safety and care and creates an environment marked by danger, overwhelming stimulation and helplessness," Berkman and Esserman wrote.

"The repetitive and persistent experience of helplessness can lead to disruptions of children's development in both the short and long term. When police officers are quick to restore safety, and when they do so in a calm, respectful, culturally sensitive and non-punitive manner, they set the stage for battered women and their children to reestablish their own sense of security and control."

Awareness of children and their response to violence and trauma are critical.

"They should not assume that children are sleeping (even if its nighttime) or that

young children do not notice or understand what has happened," the article states. "Even very young children can be acutely aware of changes in their parents' tones of voice and can have frightening ideas about what can happen to their parents or to themselves when caretaking adults become violent."

However, the children may be struggling to handle conflicting feelings resulting from the trauma and have questions that need to be answered.

"Directly addressing the child sends the message that officers are interested in the child's experience and care enough to listen," Berkman and Esserman wrote. "Listening with an open mind allows officers to know the child's concerns and respond appropriately. For example, some children worry that a parent who is arrested will be cold or hungry or hurt in jail, or imagine there was something the

child could have done to stop the violence. If officers are able to hear these ideas, they can provide facts that address the child's mind."

Additionally, supporting parents' efforts to provide safety for themselves and the children, coordinating with child protective services, following up with the family and building a relationship with them and working together through interdisciplinary collaboration all are important parts of ensuring a healthier future for the family.

"Officers who understand some of the basic issues related to psychological response to trauma can more effectively use their observations to stabilize scenes of crisis, investigate criminal activity and develop trusting relationships in the community," the authors wrote. 🍌

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